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ASSET RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM 14 MARCH 2022 STELLENBOSCH

How can solidarity networks undergird agro ecology in promoting the resilience of women in the face of climate change?

mahlathini development foundation

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Problem Statement

- The COVID-19 Pandemic has exposed how fragile food systems are (FAO, 2020). This crisis coupled with the growing climate emergency has highlighted how people rely on community networks in order to survive in uncertain times.
- **Eco-feminists argue that the disproportionate distribution of resources and the preferential treatment given to men and industrial agriculture are intersectional concerns that often leave women and regenerative forms of agriculture at disadvantage (Shiva, V, 2016).**

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Research Question

How can solidarity networks undergird agro ecology to enhance resilience of women in the face of climate change?

- Sub-question 1: What existing networks already support agroe-cology practices of women? What inhibits and enables these solidarity networks?
- Sub -question 2: How does an understanding of solidarity networks contribute to the concept of social innovation and the practice of agroecology?

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Objectives of Study

1. To identify existing solidarity networks that could support agro-ecological practice.
2. To document what inhibits and enables solidarity networks from flourishing in the context of agro-ecology.
3. To support sharing and learning between the two agro-ecology groups in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga towards enhancing these solidarity networks.
4. To develop recommendations for policy change

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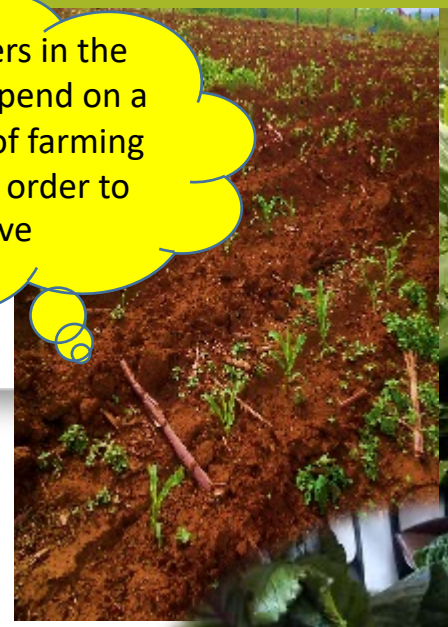
Methodology

- A PAR Approach was used in this research
- Limitation of research: shorter timeframe than what is required for PAR
- Research was conducted through a series of individual interviews, focus group discussions, cross learning workshops
- Outputs (animations/videos/handbook)

Context of Study

Most farmers in the Midlands depend on a wide range of farming activities in order to survive



- Area: Swayimane and Ozwathini
- 30 farmers from across Midlands (10 from each area)
- High rainfall areas, deep well drained soils
- Majority women between the ages of 40 and 80 years old.
- Between 5-10% of participants are men between the ages of 40 and 75 years old.
- Participants practice mixed farming

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Local Solidarity Networks in Midlands

Solidarity networks can be described as groups (both formal and informal) of mutual interests and cooperation that are formed, often in response harsh realities such climate change and COVID 19. According to Smith (2009), solidarity networks focus on and explore alternatives to the challenges of marginalization, underdevelopment, and poverty in communities.

- ❑CA Learning Groups
- ❑Stokvels (meat, blanket, money, funeral)
- ❑Savings and Loan Associations
- ❑ Groups that assist orphans
- ❑DARD Farmers' Association
- ❑Livestock groups
- ❑Mushroom Prodn Groups
- ❑Church Groups

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Benefits and Challenges of Solidarity Networks

BENEFITS OF SOLIDARITY NETWORKS

- ❑ Knowledge access and sharing
- ❑ Conservation of soil and water
- ❑ Saving money for various needs
- ❑ Preservation of culture (the principles of *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *ubumbano* (solidarity)
- ❑ CC Mitigation

CHALLENGES

- ❑ Jealousy amongst group members
- ❑ Poor attendance of meetings
- ❑ Lack of cooperation amongst group members
- ❑ Gossiping
- ❑ Cliques
- ❑ Lack of confidentiality
- ❑ Poor record keeping

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Findings on the Role of each Network

- Farmers ranked RA the highest in all categories during a matrix ranking exercise which was to identify which category each network was most effective.
- CA contributes not only to knowledge creation and soil and water conservation but also has a positive impact on strengthening community relations.
- Stokvels, burial schemes, savings groups and church groups played a more significant role in saving money, preservation of cultural values and solidarity.
- There was an indirect link between local savings groups/stokvels and farming activities.

GOBIZEMBE	CA learning group	DARD Farmers Association	Sewing Group	Money Stokvel	Grocery Stokvel	Harvesting Group
Access to Knowledge	2	2	2	1	2	2
Soil and water conservation	2	2	0	0	0	1
Saving money	2	2	2	2	2	1
Increased resilience to climate change	2	0	0	0	0	1
Preservation of culture	2	2	2	1	2	2
Solidarity	2	1	2	2	0	2
TOTAL	12	9	8	6	6	9

MAYIZEKANYE	CA learning group	DARD Farmers Association	Savings Group	Burial scheme	Stokvel	Harvesting Group
Access to Knowledge	2	2	2	2	2	2
Soil and water conservation	2	2	0	0	1	1
Saving money	2	2	2	2	2	1
Increased resilience to climate change	2	2	2	0	0	1
Preservation of culture	2	2	2	1	2	2
Solidarity	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mayizekanye	12	12	10	7	9	9

OZWATHINI	CA learning group	DARD Farmers Association	Calf Group	Savings Group	Burial Scheme	Harvesting Group
Access to Knowledge	2	2	2	2	2	2
Soil and water conservation	2	1	2	0	0	0
Saving money	2	2	2	2	2	1
Increased resilience to climate change	2	1	2	0	0	0
Preservation of culture	2	2	2	0	2	2
Solidarity	2	2	2	2	2	2
	12	10	12	6	8	7

CA & Access to knowledge

- Various Learning Platforms
- Greater understanding of the destructive effects of ploughing on soils
- Understanding of CA as an approach to farming
- Individual Experimentation

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CA & Conservation of soil and Water

- Reduction of erosion
- Increase in organic matter
- Crop residues in the field and the incorporation of manure also has a positive effect on soil health
- Experience has shown that the monocrop model of farming has long term detrimental effects on the soil.


Maize and Summer Cover Crop plot in Mayizekanye


Maize and Cowpea intercrop, Ozwathini


Maize mono crop plot in Ozwathini


Maize Stover saved from previous season, rotated with amadumbe

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CA & Saving Money

According to farmers CA has had a positive effect on their income;

- ❑ Saving on ploughing costs
- ❑ Reduced use of synthetic fertilisers
- ❑Role of VLSA'S?

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CA & Cultural Preservation

- CA has *revived* and also *enhanced* the way their forefathers grew food
- Before mechanization, people used to plant by hand and erosion was not as severe as it is today
- Advanced equipment in CA means that people can still employ good practice without damaging their soils.
- Some farmers have incorporated CA into their traditional cropping systems

Maize intercropped with pumpkin

Maize intercropped with Amadumbe

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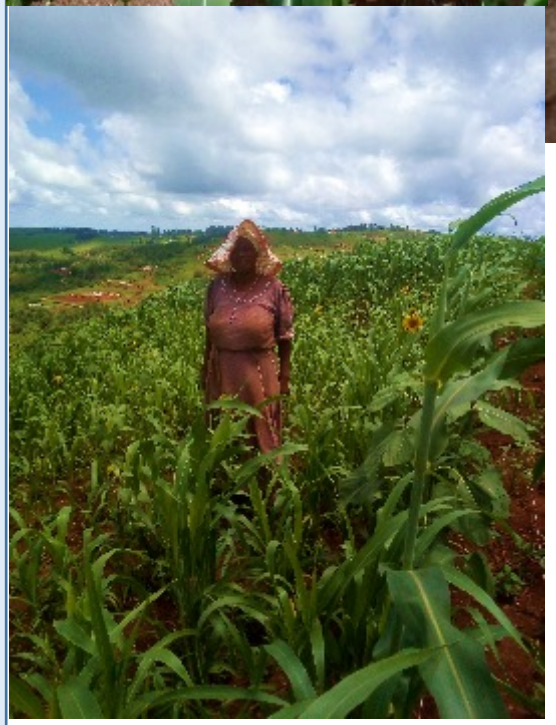
CA &Climate Change Resilience

- The unpredictable weather patterns of KZN have often led to sudden hailstorms which caused extensive damage to crops.
- CA plots have been seen to be more resilient to harsh weather conditions. Summer cover crops in Gobizembe were almost unaffected by heavy hailstorms
- Farmers witnessed first hand how minimum tillage protected their soils during unrelenting heavy rainfalls compared to their ploughed fields.



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CA & Solidarity

- ❑ Women at forefront of innovation
- ❑ Emergence of women leaders in CA networks
- ❑ Strengthened community relationships
- ❑ Sharing of knowledge and skills
- ❑ **Emergence of new networks**

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Conclusion

- Solidarity Networks central to developing social agency needed to cement new innovations
- CA learning groups are the best platform for supporting agro-ecology initiatives
- **Application of all CA principles has led to greater resilience, sustainability and improved income**

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The welfare of each is bound up in the welfare of all…

Hellen Keller

Thank You!